

How Israel Helped Create Hamas

In the 1970s, Israel Saw Hamas' Founders as Allies



By Pierre Tristam

It isn't the kind of history Israelis like to talk about, or admit, but it's also undeniable: Hamas is at least partly an intentional creation of Israel that dates back to the 1970s.

Back then the secular [Palestine Liberation Organization](#) was waging a terror campaign against Israel, which it vowed to destroy. There was no contact between Israel and the PLO, at least not officially. But Israel looked for Palestinians who didn't align themselves with the PLO. It found them, in Gaza, in an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood—deeply pious Palestinians who were opposed to the PLO's secular outlook, and who had adopted the Brotherhood's motto: "Islam is the solution. The Koran is our constitution."

The Wall Street Journal's Andrew Higgins in January 2009 provided [a concise history](#) of the serrated Hamas-Israel relationship in the context of both sides' mania for outsmarting and outlasting the other. "A look at Israel's decades-long dealings with Palestinian radicals -- including some little-known attempts to cooperate with the Islamists," Higgins wrote, "reveals a catalog of unintended and often perilous consequences."

Waltzing with Hamas

The Palestinian group that would begin calling itself Hamas in 1987 was founded by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, a half-blind cleric partially paralyzed by a childhood sports accident. In the 1970s, Yassin's interest was to turn Palestinians toward the Koran and

to find their way through it, rather than through the PLO. Israel saw an opportunity to battle the PLO from within its own Palestinian ranks by openly supporting Yassin and his followers.

Israel's assumption that Yassin could be a viable alternative to Yasser Arafat was the same sort of miscalculation the United States committed in Iran in the 1970s, when the CIA cultivated radical Islamist groups there should the regime of the Shah of Iran falter or fall. In 1979, the regime did fall. The CIA had misread the forces of political Islam in Iran. It had also misread its reach: Political Islam wasn't a fad. It was the future.

Lessons not learned, the United States, under the guidance of the Reagan administration, committed an equally catastrophic miscalculation in Afghanistan in the 1980s, when the CIA armed and supported Arab and Afghan mujahideen in their war against Soviet occupiers. [Osama bin Laden](#) was the Arab mujahideen's leaders.

Political Islam

What did Afghan and Arab mujahideen, Iranian militants and Yassin's rising pieties in Gaza have in common? Political Islam -- "which," as the [Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk](#) noted, "has much less to do with Islam than is commonly thought," and much more to do with a conception of absolutist power in the name (rather than in the service of) Allah. Like the United States, Israel was blinded by expediency. It did not see political Islam's long-term aims, only its short-term possibilities as pawn in Israel's designs on the PLO.

Israel had a no-contact policy with the PLO. It had no such policy with other Palestinian groups. It embraced Yassin, who called his group Mujama Al-Islamiya (which loosely means Muslim brotherhood, or Muslim association) and registered it officially as an Islamic charity. It certainly was that. Yassin built schools, clinics, a library, ran social services that Yasser Arafat's [Fatah organization](#) neglected, cleaned streets, provided religious education to children, and slowly, gradually carved its way into the appreciative hearts of Gazans. Meanwhile, Arafat and Fatah were floundering in the eyes of ordinary Palestinians. Arafat in 1993 renounced terrorism, Fatah and the PLO revoked their vow to destroy Israel, and the two sides began working toward a two-state solution. Their failures were Hamas' gains.

Could Hamas Have Been Stopped?

“Arieh Spitzzen, the former head of the Israeli military's Department of Palestinian Affairs, says that even if Israel had tried to stop the Islamists sooner,” Higgins wrote, “he doubts it could have done much to curb political Islam, a movement that was spreading across the Muslim world. He says attempts to stop it are akin to trying to change the internal rhythms of nature: ‘It is like saying: ‘I will kill all the mosquitoes.’ But then you get even worse insects that will kill you... You break the balance. You kill Hamas you might get [al Qaeda](#).’”

But why one or the other? That question, Higgins leaves unasked because it implicates Israel's uncompromising and, in the end, self-defeating attempts to shape its Palestinian neighbors in its own image of pliant, predictable subservience. As Roger Cohen wrote in The New York Review of Books, Israel “is ghettoizing itself, not least from the agonizing plight of the estimated 1.5 million Palestinians crammed into the narrow strip of land that is Gaza.”

When Hamas Turned Violent

Yassin's group renamed itself Hamas at the beginning of the first Palestinian [intifada](#), in 1987. A year later Hamas [published its charter](#), which calls, in part, for wiping out Israel. Israel initially ignored the charter and continued to talk with Hamas militants—until 1989, when Hamas launched its first direct attack on Israeli soldiers.

By 2004, when Hamas had embraced [suicide bombings](#) as a tactic, Israel reverted to an old tactic of its own: assassinations. An Israeli helicopter killed Yassin as he was leaving a prayer service. His bodyguards and nine civilian bystanders were also killed. A few weeks later, an Israeli gunship fired a missile at the car that was carrying Yassin's successor, Abdel Aziz Rantis, killing him, his bodyguards and his son. It was then that [Khaled Mashaal](#), whom Israel had tried to assassinate years earlier, took over Hamas, directing its political operations from Damascus.

Israel's War on Hamas

Besides killing between 1,200 and 1,500 Palestinians, most of them civilians and 40 percent of them women and children (compared with 13 Israelis, most of them soldiers) Israel's 22-day war against [Hamas](#) in December 2008 and January 2009 did not change the equation in Gaza. Hamas is still in control. Its military wing is largely unscathed. Admiration for Hamas has soared among Palestinians, while respect for Fatah and the [Palestinian Authority](#) continue to fall.

<http://middleeast.about.com/od/israelandpalestine/a/me090126.htm>

Hamas is a Creation of Mossad

by Hassane Zerouky

Thanks to the Mossad, Israel's "Institute for Intelligence and Special Tasks", the Hamas was allowed to reinforce its presence in the occupied territories. Meanwhile, Arafat's Fatah Movement for National Liberation as well as the Palestinian Left were subjected to the most brutal form of repression and intimidation

Let us not forget that it was Israel, which in fact created Hamas. According to Zeev Sternell, historian at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, "Israel thought that it was a smart ploy to push the Islamists against the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO)".

Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of the Islamist movement in Palestine, returning from Cairo in the seventies, established an Islamic charity association. Prime Minister Golda Meir, saw this as an opportunity to counterbalance the rise of Arafat's Fatah movement. According to the Israeli weekly *Koteret Rashit* (October 1987), "The Islamic associations as well as the university had been supported and encouraged by the Israeli military authority" in charge of the (civilian) administration of the West Bank and Gaza. "They [the Islamic associations and the university] were authorized to receive money payments from abroad."

The Islamists set up orphanages and health clinics, as well as a network of schools, workshops which created employment for women as well as system of financial aid to the poor. And in 1978, they created an "Islamic University" in Gaza. "The military authority was convinced that these activities would weaken both the PLO and the leftist organizations in Gaza." At the end of 1992, there were six hundred mosques in Gaza. Thanks to Israel's intelligence agency Mossad (Israel's Institute for Intelligence and Special Tasks), the Islamists were allowed to reinforce their presence in the occupied territories. Meanwhile, the members of Fatah (Movement for the National Liberation of Palestine) and the Palestinian Left were subjected to the most brutal form of repression.

In 1984, Ahmed Yassin was arrested and condemned to twelve years in prison, after the discovery of a hidden arms cache. But one year later, he was set free and resumed his activities. And when the Intifada ('uprising') began, in October 1987, which took the Islamists by surprise, Sheik Yassin responded by creating the Hamas (The Islamic Resistance Movement): "God is our beginning, the prophet our model, the Koran our constitution", proclaims article 7 of the charter of the organization.

Ahmed Yassin was in prison when, the Oslo accords (*Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government*) were signed in September 1993. The Hamas had rejected Oslo outright. But at that time, 70% of Palestinians had condemned the attacks on Israeli civilians. Yassin did everything in his power to undermine the Oslo accords.

Even prior to Prime Minister Rabin's death, he had the support of the Israeli government. The latter was very reluctant to implement the peace agreement.

The Hamas then launched a carefully timed campaign of attacks against civilians, one day before the meeting between Palestinian and Israeli negotiators, regarding the formal recognition of Israel by the National Palestinian Council. These events were largely instrumental in the formation of a Right wing Israeli government following the May 1996 elections.

Quite unexpectedly, Prime Minister Netanyahu ordered Sheik Ahmed Yassin to be released from prison ("on humanitarian grounds") where he was serving a life sentence. Meanwhile, Netanyahu, together with President Bill Clinton, was putting pressure on Arafat to control the Hamas. In fact, Netanyahu knew that he could rely, once more, on the Islamists to sabotage the Oslo accords. Worse still: after having expelled Yassin to Jordan, Prime Minister Netanyahu allowed him to return to Gaza, where he was welcomed triumphantly as a hero in October 1997.

Arafat was helpless in the face of these events. Moreover, because he had supported Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Gulf war, (while the Hamas had cautiously abstained from taking sides), the Gulf states decided to cut off their financing of the Palestinian Authority. Meanwhile, between February and April 1998, Sheik Ahmad Yassin was able to raise several hundred million dollars, from those same countries. The budget of The Hamas was said to be greater than that of the Palestinian Authority. These new sources of funding enabled the Islamists to effectively pursue their various charitable activities. It is estimated that one Palestinian out of three is the recipient of financial aid from the Hamas. And in this regard, Israel has done nothing to curb the inflow of money into the occupied territories.

The Hamas had built its strength through its various acts of sabotage of the peace process, in a way which was compatible with the interests of the Israeli government. In turn, the latter sought in a number of ways, to prevent the application of the Oslo accords. In other words, Hamas was fulfilling the functions for which it was originally created: to prevent the creation of a Palestinian State. And in this regard, Hamas and Ariel Sharon, see eye to eye; they are exactly on the same wave length.

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/ZER403A.html>